

**STATEMENT OF T.P. O'MAHONEY
CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESIDENT'S NATIONAL HIRE VETERANS COMMITTEE**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

ON

H.R. 419, THE "HIRE VETERANS ACT OF 2004"

May 4, 2005

Good afternoon, Chairman Boozman, ranking member Herseth and members of the Committee. I am T.P. O'Mahoney, Chairman of the President's National Hire Veterans Committee and it is my honor to appear before you today to address H.R. 419, the "Hire Veterans Act of 2004" that would among other things reauthorize the President's National Hire Veterans Committee.

In the Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002, the Congress gave the President's National Hire Veterans Committee the mission to make employers and businesses more aware of our veterans through the public workforce system. This proposed legislation will extend the President's National Hire Veterans Committee through December 31, 2008. It also will permit the Secretary of Labor to use funds from the allocation to the states for the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs) and Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs) programs.

The nationwide network of One-Stop Career Centers is the common denominator between our Nation's employers and veterans who are seeking meaningful career employment. To emphasize this connection, The President's National Hire Veterans Committee launched a nationwide campaign with a Web site, www.hirevetsfirst.gov, as its cornerstone where any employer using the Web site will be able to locate the nearest One-Stop Career Center within four clicks.

I appreciate the issues connected with transitioning from the military and the challenges our veterans face every day searching for employment. I too, am a veteran. I was a Naval Aviator, commissioned in the United States Marine Corps, and was honorably discharged with the rank of Major. I also have experience with both veteran and labor issues having served as a Commissioner with the Texas Workforce Commission and on numerous panels at the State and National levels representing airline pilots.

While serving at the Texas Workforce Commission, I had the opportunity to appear before the House Veteran Affairs Committee in support of the Jobs for Veterans Act. I can tell you that, at that time, I knew the legislation to be sound and good, but did not know the impact that it was going to have in promoting the value of veterans across this great nation. I sit here now looking back to those hearings in 2002 and say thank you for being visionaries.

Our nation has a great number of men and women on active duty today serving in a variety of jobs and locations. Additionally, our active force is augmented more and more

by local Guard and Reserve units called up to serve in the Global War on Terrorism. These fine service members are dedicated to their task at hand - keeping America safe. When their deployment or enlistment ends they return home -- home to their families, home to their communities -- and many go home to look for a job. In a real sense of patriotism, they performed exactly like generations before them, they answered the call to duty, and when done laid down their sword and picked up the plowshare.

But unlike generations before them, the work system and environment has changed dramatically. Agriculture, manufacturing, and mining industries have given way to service, technical, and financial industries. These newer industries require higher levels of training, specialization, and experience. As the job requirements changed, business leaders looked to colleges, technical schools and existing workforce individuals to fill their employment openings. At times the quantity of skilled individuals was far less than the demand and businesses began seeking additional pools of talented staff.

Here is where The President's National Hire Veterans Committee comes in.

Today's veteran skills have changed, just like industry changed. Our service men and women are high tech, skilled and experienced in many of the same systems industry uses today. They are trained in state-of-the-art equipment, be it in medicine, computers, transportation or logistics, just to name a few. I can hear you ask, "if this is true why do we need to promote veterans today?" The answer is easy; there are fewer key leaders and hiring decision-makers that are veterans. Also, many making the hiring decision have

perceptions based on what they saw, experienced or knew. Be it two or thirty years ago only veterans remember what it means to have served.

The core values veterans offer today, what we are referring to as “soft skills” such as teamwork, leadership, triumph over adversity and integrity to name a few as opposed to the hard skills presented on a resume, are the same as those of past generations. However, there is a need to educate our businesses and employers about the new veterans’ total skills, abilities and potential. This is our charge, which at this time is still ongoing but building momentum.

We know overwhelmingly that employers have a favorable impression of veterans in the workforce. Yet, few have ever used the public workforce system to find or hire a veteran. We are seeking to change that through the efforts of the President’s National Hire Veterans Committee.

I would like to discuss what our Committee has accomplished this past year.

As I mentioned, during fiscal year 2004, the Committee launched a national campaign to promote the hiring of veterans and transitioning servicemembers. The purpose of such a program is to reach out to potential hiring authorities while informing our veterans’ population of the resources available to them through the public workforce system.

Second, a local, grassroots campaign was instituted to integrate the national message with the workforce investment system and employers at the State and local level. The goal of

the national campaign is to increase the nationwide awareness of the value veterans bring to the workforce. The strategy focuses on the key decision-makers and hiring authorities in business and the public sector. Using high impact methods that are integrated in a cost-effective way, the campaign is promoting veterans for employment and shows interested employers how to hire them.

The strategy takes a unique approach; rather than focusing on patriotic duty, it emphasizes veterans as highly valued workforce assets. Fundamental to the creation of this campaign was the development of strategies that embraced, rather than replaced, existing systems, and the establishment of a partnership with workforce organizations at the national, State and local levels.

The core of the campaign is the hirevetsfirst.gov Web site, which offers special zones for employers and veterans. To guide parties to the Web site, several national advertisements were used to attract human resource specialists, executives and veterans. A wrap-around cover “outsert” program, mailed to select executive readers of *Business Week*, contains interviews with business leaders who have a background as veterans and/or have hired numerous veterans to enhance their workforce. These leaders include Robert Lutz, Vice Chairman of the Board, General Motors; Jackson Moore, President - CEO designate of Regions Financial Corporation; Bob Nardelli, CEO of the Home Depot; Marty Evans, CEO of the American Red Cross; and John Potter, CEO of the Postal Service. A four-page insert in *HR Magazine* (the magazine for the Society of Human Resource Management) discusses the top ten reasons for hiring veterans and

includes an ad with the headline “Business is a Battle. We Suggest You Staff Accordingly.” Also, banner ads were inserted into electronic job boards to drive employers seeking veterans in the private sector to the public sector One-Stop Career Centers.

These creative pieces show how veterans present economic value to the employer not only because of their training, but more importantly because of their ability to learn new skills, a propensity for teamwork, self-discipline, loyalty and many other character factors that translate into productivity for the employer.

Anticipating that not all of the targeted audience attracted by the advertisements would visit the Web site first, the Committee established a protocol that was integrated within the Department of Labor’s toll-free help line to refer callers to the nearest One-Stop Career Center.

To maximize exposure of the campaign within the public workforce system and to ensure coordinated service delivery, a joint letter from the Veterans’ Employment Training Service (VETS) and Employment and Training Administration (ETA), plus a supplemental fact sheet, were sent electronically to over 4,500 regional, State, and local officials of the public workforce system, the national leaders of veterans organizations, and directors of State agencies involved in assisting veterans. The letter and fact sheet articulated the goals for the campaign and emphasized the implementation of a coordinated service delivery strategy between One-Stop Career Center business services

staff, job counselors, and Local Veterans Employment Representatives (LVERs) and Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPS).

To supplement the national campaign efforts, the Committee established a grassroots component that is focused at the State and local levels. The Committee, with the support of VETS, implemented a communications strategy that included partnering with several States to have local veteran representatives from particular states serve as a regional marketing representatives. Five individuals are now in place providing support to Regional, State and local areas on behalf of the Committee.

Concurrent with the national launch, Committee members and staff started briefing State officials, local workforce boards, and veteran groups about the mission of the Committee and the nature of the campaign. The Committee members and staff participated in over 100 events in 25 States, in 2004 to highlight the HireVetsFirst message. Coordinating with State workforce directors, they encouraged the issuance of proclamations by the individual State governors for a HireVetsFirst month to reflect State support of the campaign. Through the end of calendar year 2004, 16 governors had signed *Hire a Veteran Month* declarations: Arkansas, Florida, South Dakota, Illinois, Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, and Tennessee.

And thus far this year we have had 12 more governors sign Hire Veterans Month proclamations, including Oregon. Louisiana's Governor will sign their proclamation on June 23, 2005 and California's proclamation is pending. Our goal this year is to have all

states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands issue a proclamation promoting Hire Veterans months. To date we have 28 signed, with 15 more scheduled to be signed by the end of June 2005. We will achieve our complete goal this year.

The Committee members have been a catalyst for local and statewide initiatives for the campaign. One Committee member spoke to an audience of over 4500 veterans and guests at a Veterans Day ceremony to promote the Committee and its objectives. This event was videotaped for showing to our servicemembers in Iraq. Another member has had meetings with his Fortune 500 human resource colleagues to explain the known qualities of veterans in the workplace and the value of the HireVetsFirst Web site, www.hirevetsfirst.gov. One member simply walked a company representative through the Web site and within 10 minutes placed him in touch with a Local Veterans Employment Specialist who helped that company “hire” a veteran to establish a franchise for the company. The Secretary of Defense’s representative has proposed to the Department of Defense that our HireVetsFirst Web site be permanently included on the DD 214 form given to all discharged veterans. At the national level, during the Department of Labor’s annual Salute to America’s Veterans ceremony, HireVetsFirst was the theme of an address by the Executive Director of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Moreover, Home Depot, General Motors, Boeing, Regions Bank, Leo Burnett and Medco Health are represented on the Committee. And at hearings before this Committee, Ford Motors, Daimler Chrysler, CALPINES, CISCO Systems and UPS among others have testified of their commitment to hiring Veterans.

Mac Tools, the largest distributor of quality tools, recently became a HireVETSFirst employer, a designation available through the HireVetsFirst Web site. In fact Mac Tools announced a program to award a \$13,000 full mechanic tool kit to a veteran each quarter. The first award was made to Sergeant Alfred Kalous in February, less than 60 days after he was discharged as a disabled veteran, at a job secured for him through the public workforce system before he left Walter Reed Hospital.

The Committee has been very active in highlighting the skills of veterans and is working closely on the needs of disabled veterans. In late 2004, the Committee started a liaison with the newly established program, REALifelines (Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines). REALifelines is a Department of Labor initiative in which the Veterans' Employment and Training Service and the Department's Office of Disability Employment Policy and Employment and Training Administration address the needs of transitioning wounded and injured servicemembers who have been fighting the War on Terrorism. The Committee will be developing information for REALifelines on our Web site, www.hirevetsfirst.gov very soon.

To reach out to veterans who have an interest in entrepreneurship, the Committee will add information on self-employment to its Web site to complement salaried employment opportunities. We will be working with the Small Business Administrator, an ex-officio member, in reaching out to franchisors as potential "employers" of veterans who desire an entrepreneurial employment track.

As you can see, the Committee has only just begun a very ambitious program. The Committee is promoting the attributes of a unique class of employee – the veteran. The members of the Committee are eagerly reaching out to their counterparts and within their communities to highlight the qualities of our veteran workforce. Each member is establishing opportunities to herald the excellent qualities of our veterans to tie into the national outreach campaign. Many are veterans themselves who remember their service as a milestone in their careers and are carrying this personal testimony in their messages. All of the Committee members are driven to make sure that, as our servicemembers transition to the civilian job sector, their veteran status is recognized as a powerful cornerstone for a vigorous national economy.

Our goal for the President's National Hire Veterans Committee is to make sure that every veteran who wants a job will be able to find it. Also we seek to have the veteran recognized for the training and skills he or she acquired while serving our country. This is most ambitious, but is attainable because more and more today, Americans in the position to create a job or hire a new employee are impacted by what they see daily displayed by the media reporting the War on Terror. The faces employers see today are tomorrow's leaders for their businesses.

With our limited funds we are beginning to make an impact, but outreach to employers is all about repetitive contacts to positively reinforce perceptions. We are reaching new

employers everyday, but we cannot contact all businesses individually. To raise awareness is to market the veteran and his or her skills on a consistent basis to employers.

You recognized the need and took the steps in creating The President's National Hire Veterans Committee. We are on the ground, actively engaged in energizing employers to hire veterans.

In closing, I thank the Subcommittee for having a hearing to address the Hire Veterans Act of 2004 and I appreciate this opportunity to inform you of what the President's National Hire Veterans Committee has accomplished. Speaking for all the members of the Committee, we continue to look forward to a strong partnership with the House Veterans Affairs Committee and the Congress in its pursuit of creating more job opportunities for our veterans. We seek to reach all employers, large and small, old and new, with the good news that, "hiring a veteran is not goodwill, but good business." Working together we will bring a better tomorrow for the many who have served and those who wish to serve their country by wearing its uniform.